

The Part Played By **Yasser Arafat** In The Move
Towards a Palestinian State.

Yasser Arafat was born into a Palestinian family in Egypt in 1929. Even in his early life he began fighting from age eighteen onwards, first the British, then the Israelis. At the age of thirty he founded a magazine in 1959 which aimed to create and identity for the Palestinians living in camps. This was a good way of giving the people publicity and also shows that his original motives when he was young were good.

As time went on, Arafat's actions began to contradict his early good intentions as he set up Al-Fatah, a guerrilla movement that set up guerrilla cells to launch attacks into Israel. This already made him look like more of a terrorist than a freedom-fighter.

In 1968 Arafat lost a war, his second major defeat after a battle lost in 1948. Despite this set-back in Arafat's campaign, he gained many new supporters who believed in what he was doing. Later that year he was assigned the position of leader of the PLO, the 'umbrella' for the organisation of the main guerrilla movements. This further made his motives look like they were in the interests of terror.

The two lost wars had been set-backs for Arafat but he kept up the threat by launching cross-border raids from the new PLO head quarters in Lebanon, having been driven out of Jordan by King Hussein.

After the Munich Massacre in 1972, Arafat gave his definite approval, and yet later claimed he had always been against it. "We had to associate ourselves with what was happening in order to control the situation and then turn off the terror tap. And it is this that we who were against the use of terror are called terrorists." At the time this statement was taken as a turning point by the world. Before this, his image was of a violent terrorist who had prevented any sort of compromise. He gained respect for the Palestinian cause.

Apparently realising his tactics were ineffective; in 1974 he opted for a new strategy. He was allowed to access the UN claiming "I

have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand." This quote sums up Arafat's ambivalence. He claims he wants peace but if that requires terror, he seems prepared for anything. However the fact that he mentioned the olive branch, a symbol for peace, gave good publicity for the cause and this was also the first time a Palestinian had managed to speak to the UN so this was an important step in the fight for a Palestinian state because there would be a chance for discussion.

In 1982 Israel attacked the Lebanon and Arafat fled. His leadership was weak but the upshot of the attacks was support gained from various parties. In 1987 Arafat seemed to change his tactics once more, making him look all the more fickle and unstable. He announced Intifada and at last respected the right for Israel to exist and renounced terror. At the time this showed that Arafat wanted to gain international respect and again would allow discussion, the possibility of peace and a move towards a Palestinian state.

When the Gulf war began in 1990, Arafat made the massive mistake of siding with Saddam Hussein, a hated man who would gain Arafat no support. Fortunately, Hussein's influence on Arafat was not too extreme and Arafat continued to stick by peaceful words.

Having agreed to begin the peace process, secret talks in Norway went on followed by a peace accord with Rabin. Palestine gained some authority in parts of the west bank and the Gaza strip. This showed Arafat what good could come of peaceful methods as this would not have been achieved through violence.

However, despite these advances in the struggle for a compromise, Israelis were still controlling Palestinian people. Meanwhile Arafat had been elected 'President' of a country he hadn't even got yet. Nonetheless this shows the importance given to him in his role as a leader of the Palestinians and the recognition that there should be a Palestinian state.

Hamas set in with extremism and terror where Israelis were still ruling new Palestine settlements. Arafat shouldn't have allowed this because it could only make him look bad in the interests of peace.

In 2000 Bill Clinton offered a Palestinian state in Gaza and 97% of the West bank, with a capital in Jerusalem. Arafat did not sign. There are mixed opinions on the reasons for this. It is possible that Arafat chose not to sign in case of any assassination threat from Palestinians with an 'all or nothing' attitude. But despite this, this offer was Arafat's best opportunity in his life long campaign, and the fact that he didn't sign makes it look like he was lying when he said he would agree to compromise. But in the interests of peace this may have been a good decision.

Israeli leader Sharon launched provocative marches to the Temple Mount which was retaliated to by Hamas with terrorist suicide bombing, again making Arafat appear bad. Although Arafat denied his favour of the actions of Hamas, he was also accused of smuggling in arms from Iran which again contradicts his claims.

As Hamas continued suicide bombing, Sharon, a violent extremist leader, launched attacks into Palestine cities and captured Arafat prisoner. This once again made people feel sorry for him but it was becoming apparent that sympathy was getting him no where in the fight for a Palestinian state.

On the 24th June President Bush calls for a change in leadership from Arafat. It had become the general opinion that Arafat's influence was useless.

In conclusion Yasser Arafat has tried every tactic and almost always failed. But in terms of peace keeping he has generally done well, particularly by making the controversial decision of declining Clinton's offer because extremists from both sides would have been likely to react violently.

His involvement with Camp David in 1978 and the Oslo Accords is progress that cannot be denied. Arafat must get some credit for this but without the help and encouragement of America who brokered the talks. If Arafat's claims are true; that he has no control over Hamas then Arafat has done as much as he can.